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Pennsylvania Forestry  
Problem

By  
Henry W. Shoemaker  
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# The Pennsylvania Forestry Problem

An Address by

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"Pennsylvania's Forests hold the  
key to her future not less than her  
farms, her factories and her mines."  
—Governor Sproul at Ole Bull's  
Castle, July 19, 1920.

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# The Pennsylvania Forestry Problem



WHY were great cities built in such terrible waterless deserts? This query is promulgated many times by travelers in Northern Africa, and the answer is that in the days when those cities were built they were not in the midst of deserts, but in the heart of fertile and flowering regions. In the days before the Christian era, when the tide of Roman colonization was spreading over the known world, Libya, Numidia and Mauritania were lands of the utmost agricultural prosperity, known far and wide for fruit raising and stock breeding as well. Forests covered the mountains and ravines, and there were many rivers, lakes, waterfalls and springs which added to the advantages and beauty of the region. For these reasons, probably more than the desire to subdue savage tribes, caused the Romans to penetrate into the country back of the Mediterranean coast and enforce their form of culture at the point of the sword. The natives either were killed or driven further south, and the conquering Romans became possessed of a vast territory almost from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, which became known as the granary of Europe. Rich ports were established at Bone, Bougie, Algiers and Oran to transport the products of the fields to Europe, and a period of continued prosperity seemed assured. The forests teemed with all kinds of wild beasts and birds, every animal from the elephant to the lion and leopard being found there, and these creatures, like our modern exponents of European civilization, gave concern to the Roman colonists. Not that they were never exploited financially, as when the Emperor Titus dedicated the famous Colosseum at Rome five thousand lions from Mauritania were slaughtered. It was thought, however, that lions were destructive to stock, just as today bears are wilfully blamed by the good people of Potter County every time a stray cur dog kills a sheep. The lions, leopards, cheetahs, bears, lynxes, hyenas, wolves and jackals of Mauritania must be destroyed lest a few carcasses of dead cattle be eaten by these forest monsters. Some wise Romans devised as a means of ridding the country of wild beasts that the forests be fired, as the haunts of the animals could not be reduced fast enough by lumbering, and on an appointed night a simultaneous conflagration was started covering the length and breadth of the

land. Historians tell us that it was a *magnificent spectacle* to see the Atlas, the Djurjura and the Aures mountains aflame from horizon to horizon and the destruction of wild beasts must have been a large one, though many escaped, as the last lion in Algeria was not killed until less than forty years ago. These wholesale burnings were continued semi-annually until, with the annihilation of the forests came the deluge of retribution. The roar of the lion might not be heard at night from every mountain peak as of yore, but there came a diminishment of the flow of the streams, an irregularity of rainfall, a change in climate that brooded ill for agricultural prosperity. Year by year the compulsory burning of the forests was renewed with splendid results as to lions, but ill results as to agriculture and human comfort. Rivers and streams dried up or came down from the mountains as destructive torrents for a few days and were dry for six months thereafter. Fish life was seriously affected. Potash from the burning forests dropped into such streams as were not dried up altogether, killing off the trout so completely that until recently it was believed that the trout were not indigenous to Northern Africa. Wells and springs which supplied the marvelously constructed aqueducts of such cities as Timgad, Lambese, Tolga and Volubilis no longer flowed and there was a clamor for the water which never came. No one seemed to blame the burning off or the cutting off of the forests as the causes—they awakened to that too late, just as did the people of Scotland and France when they deforested parts of the Highlands and the Cevennes because of wolves, and reaped the inexorable desert whirlwind. Agriculture diminished year by year, there was no water for the stock, farmers became discouraged and a general exodus to Italy began. The cities with no local barter or commerce were forced to live on themselves; they sank into laziness and vice, and when the barbarian hordes from the south, emboldened by stories of their enervation, attacked them, they were easy victims of massacre and pillage. Timgad and several other great cities were destroyed by fires, and as there was no water supply and diminished populations they were cleaned up as neatly as the "getaway fires" performed a similar work at Cross Fork, English Centre, or other defunct Pennsylvania lumber towns. Thus came the downfall of Roman colonization in Northern Africa, and today all that is left are broken columns, ruined temples and baths, deserted streets, gloom and desolation, where on the dark nights the hyena and the jackal



skulk about the abandoned basilicas, or bark dolefully from shattered baptistries much as Omar speaks of a similar condition in treeless Persia—

“They say the Lion and the Lizard keep

The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep.”

Are we to have this terrible story re-enacted in Pennsylvania? It seems headed that way now, and only a Legislature with a strong sense of right and a stronger backbone can stem the mad rush towards a duplication of the ruin of the Barbary States, and the similar tragedies of deforestation in China, Persia, Mesopotamia and portions of Italy, France and Spain. Pennsylvania cannot exist without the forests. She cannot be a purely urban State. There must be the products of forest and field to hold the proper balance to existence. Every person who leaves the farm for the city becomes a consumer, and the few producers left cannot supply the demand and prices rise. The era of forest fires, going unchecked for a century, has left an indelible impress on the State. Already it has diminished the flow of our rivers and streams and has dried up hundreds of creeks and springs. We now have torrential rains lasting a few days, or sometimes weeks, as our experience of the present August, then long dry periods of drought, when agriculture and live stock suffer.

We have high winds due to the absence of forest windbreaks, an unbroken sun, like shines on the Sahara, and increasing difficulty for crops to grow, owing to uncertain moisture and increasing soil sterility. It is becoming harder for the farmers every year to grow crops and fruit, owing to poor soil, lack of water and inordinate increase of insect pests. The destruction of our forests by any means brings an endless chain of evils. The absence of trees means loss of birds, and the birds, more than any other means, control man's insect enemies. The lumbermen of Pennsylvania cannot be blamed but partially for the spoilation of Penn's Woods. They are only to blame for leaving so much litter in the woods as fuel for flames. If they had cut everything clean Nature, bountiful Nature, would have grown a new crop of trees. It is a part of the scheme of nature to utilize forests as well as to admire them. When the “slashings” after lumbering operations have been burned over several times, the humus is destroyed and the ground becomes unfit to produce varieties of trees of commercial value. They come up with fire cherry, quaking asp, chestnut and scrub oak, which in

turn die down and rot and enrich the soil for pine, hemlock, beech and maple. It, therefore, takes many years to fit the soil to grow good trees after spoilation by fire. It is not the right of any man to show his contempt for posterity by permitting forest fires. We have been supine and remiss and asked too much of a bountiful Providence. If Pennsylvania had not been rich in minerals and other valuable products it is safe to assume that the forest fire menace would have been controlled half a century ago or the people beggared. As it is, with the cutting of the timber has come the steady drift to the mill, the foundry, the factory and railroad shop of the industrial centres, abandoning the unprofitable farm and the cut-over forest to the cruel flames. We cannot escape the deadly parallels of history. Only as recently as 1915 Central Pennsylvania newspapers used the same language in describing a hideous forest fire on the Bald Eagle Mountain—"A magnificent spectacle"—as did the benighted Roman chroniclers of the first and second centuries A. D.

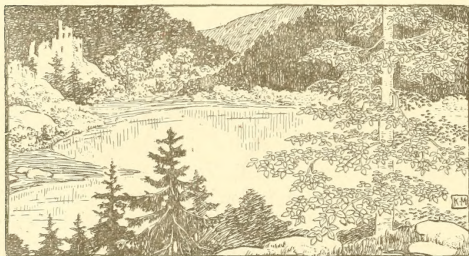
The high cost of living has been the danger signal to warn us that our drift to the cities is unwise and uneconomic. This warning is yet unheeded as, year by year, more of our farmers become discouraged by adverse conditions, "make sale" and rush to the industrial slavery of Pittsburg, Altoona, Harrisburg, Sunbury, Renovo or Avis, each recruit added to the army of consumers making living harder for the rest. High rents, canned food, restricted life, all these handicaps seem preferable at first to the desert farm. Yet soon all these workers become dissatisfied, for their lives are dismal and restricted. This drift must go unchecked for some years yet, or until a wholesale onslaught against the spoilation of our forests will result in more trees grown than are destroyed. If it were not for the forest fires which burn over close to half a million acres annually lumbering could go along unchecked in Pennsylvania, natural reforestation is so rapid. At present, lumbering vieing with the fire evil, our State bids fair to become a counterpart of the desert wastes of Mauritania or China. In foreign districts where the remaining woodlands are limited no tree can be cut on private lands without a permit, and a new tree planted in its place; that should become a law in Pennsylvania next Winter. The taxes on privately owned woodlands ought to be rebated so that it would pay persons of moderate means to save trees as an investment instead of falling victims to the blandishments of the owner of every portable "thunder shower" saw mill. The appropriation



asked by our Chief Forester Mr. Pinchot, namely, one million and a quarter dollars for two years for forest fire prevention should be passed without a quibble, as it is a small outlay to protect property conservatively valued at potentially upwards of one hundred millions of dollars. The part of the Pennsylvania desert not now owned by the Commonwealth, the wreck left by the forest fires, and to a lesser extent by the lumbermen, five million acres, should be bought and, to use the words of Governor Sproul in his epoch making address at Ole Bull's castle, "The State must be bonded, if necessary," to accomplish this. The State owns already one million and a quarter acres which it has handled disgracefully, letting it burn over, reducing its financial and economic value year by year. But let us hope that we have come to the turning of the road. With the Governor, who always has the public with him, as no other Chief Executive has had since the days of Curtin, in full accord and the best forester in the world at the head of our State forests, and a widespread sentiment created, the like of which has never been shown before, no member of the coming Legislature can afford to be reactionary and vote against a measure which means everything to the future welfare and prosperity of our beloved Commonwealth. The Forestry Department of Pennsylvania, well conceived by Dr. Rothrock, has not functioned for twenty-five years, due to lack of funds and the lack of those back of it to get it. A Pennsylvania all of city dwellers with an abandoned countryside is unthinkable, yet a change must come that will make farm life more profitable and consequently attractive. Nature's balance must be restored, forests, streams, birds, natural beauty, prosperity, then will come the day of the forest, of the natural simple life so fast slipping from our rising generations. The forest as the primitive home of the race harkens back to a healthier and nobler type of living when the simple faith of our fathers developed the American spirit and patriotism. We cannot allow the six million acre desert to expand one acre more and must hold it back and treat it like the arch destroyer of civilization that it is. It is in the hands of every one of us, dwellers in Central Pennsylvania, to forget self for a season and devote energy, time and influence to saving the forests, and the slogan will be "Pennsylvania Beautiful." Linked with the forest, apart from its material side, is the life of gardens, blossoms and flowers, the spiritualized side of existence and the labor to preserve our woods can only be a labor of love. Our reward

will be great, for generations unborn will enjoy what we have conserved for them. We are hopelessly bound to the future, as we are to the past, if there is a desert, uninhabited Pennsylvania with the ruined stacks of Pittsburg, the crumbling capitol at Harrisburg and the fallen City Hall at Philadelphia as the most distinguished features, then we who are here today will be to blame. Let our part in the future be the creation of a new Pennsylvania Beautiful!

Honorable Emerson Collins, your eloquent and gifted fellow citizen, is planning an outing to the North Mountain, which he knows and loves so well, some day early in October. He will tell such congenial spirits as go along, "David of Happy Valley," J. Horace McFarland, Colonel Lloyd, Charles H. Eldon, and their type, of the wonders of the Lancaster Road, the Government Peak, and many other points of interest. The Pennsylvania Alpine Club, through its talented Secretary, J. Herbert Walker, has promised to co-operate. The Garden Club should be represented on this pilgrimage to our local "Monarch of Mountains," and the speaker will hope to meet you one and all on that delectable occasion, the date for which will probably be shortly set by Mr. Collins. The North Mountain is surely a garden of gardens, where the rarest of wild flowers, shrubs and trees are found right at the doors of your home city!



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